

Philip and the Eunuch

Acts 8: 26-31, 35-39

“Philip the Evangelist.

Philip, a close associate of the martyred Stephen and one of the seven officials appointed to oversee the funds of Jerusalem’s Hellenist Christians, had fled Jerusalem after Stephen’s stoning. He preached in a number of towns and made quite a few converts among the Samaritans. These were Jews who did not acknowledge the Jerusalem Temple because they considered their own sanctuary on Mount Gerizim to be more sacred. During his travels in Samaria, he met an Ethiopian (the only one mentioned in the whole of the New Testament) who was returning to Africa after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem” (After Jesus 46).

“Philip in Samaria.

The graphic details of the ministry of Philip which follow, were doubtless obtained from Philip himself. St. Luke stayed at his house at Caesarea and made the acquaintance of his four virgin daughters, prophetesses. During St. Paul’s three years’ imprisonment at Caesarea, St. Luke doubtless had much intercourse with Philip, with whose liberal views he was in sympathy. The historical character of the following narratives stands upon a firm basis. In later years Philip migrated with his daughters to Tralles, in Asia Minor, of which he became the first bishop” (Dummelow 829).

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. [not in the lesson]

“Philip, the second of the seven enumerated in 6:5, and one of the Hellenistic believers expelled from Jerusalem in the persecution directed against Hellenistic Christians, traveled to the north and proclaimed ‘the Christ’ to Samaritans” (EBC 9.356).

“This account of Philip’s ministry to a high-ranking Ethiopian government official represents a further step in the advance of the gospel from its strictly Jewish confines to a full-fledged Gentile mission. Though a Gentile, the official was probably a Jewish proselyte or near-proselyte and was therefore viewed by Luke as still within a Jewish religious milieu. He had been to Jerusalem to worship, was studying the prophecy of Isaiah, and was open to further instruction from a Jew” (EBC 9.362).

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

“When Luke desires to stress the special presence and activity of God in his narrative, he frequently uses the expression ‘angel of the Lord’ for the more normal reference to ‘the spirit of the Lord’. Here Luke begins in just such a way and with such a purpose, telling us that ‘an angel

of the Lord' began the action by giving instructions to Philip—and also sustained it throughout..." (EBC 9.362).

"Philip's actions, like those of Elijah, are prompted by the Spirit, who transports him from place to place and directs his every action. It is to be noted that, as in chap. X., the angel of the Lord and the Spirit appear to be interchangeable" (Moffatt 75).

"Gaza was the southernmost city of Palestine, situated at the border of the desert leading to Egypt" (Jamieson 3.53).

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

"he arose and went. To leave a city where his hands were full of his Master's work, to go far away on a desert road, and to be kept in ignorance of the object of the journey—was fitted to stagger the faith of our zealous evangelist. But like Paul, he 'was not disobedient to the heavenly vision;' and, like Abraham, 'he went out, not knowing whither he went'" (Jamieson 3.53).

"The eunuch, though a believer in the God of Israel, was a Gentile" (Dummelow 829).

"It is not at all as clear as it might appear what was the Ethiopian official's physical condition, for the word eunuch (eunouchos) frequently appears in the LXX [an abbreviation for the Septuagint, the Koine Greek version of the Hebrew Bible] and in Greek vernacular writings 'for high military and political officials; it does not have to imply emasculation'. Therefore, we are probably justified in taking 'eunuch' to be a governmental title in an Oriental kingdom and in emphasizing two facts when considering the Ethiopian's relation to Judaism: 1) he had been on a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem and 2) he was returning with a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah in his possession, which would have been difficult for a non-Jew to get" (EBC 9.363).

"of great authority. Of high rank; an officer of the court. It is clear, from what follows, that this man was a Jew. But it is known that Jews were often raised to posts of high honour and distinction in foreign courts, as in the case of Joseph in Egypt, and of Daniel in Babylon. The treasurer was an officer of high trust and responsibility.

"and had come. This proves that he was a Jew or at least a Jewish proselyte. It was customary for the Jews in foreign lands, as far as practicable, to attend the great feasts at Jerusalem. He had gone up to attend the Passover, etc." (Barnes Notes).

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

"Read Esaias, etc. Isaiah. Reading doubtless the translation of Isaiah called the Septuagint. This translation was made in Egypt, for the special use of the Jews in Alexandria and throughout Egypt, and was that which was commonly used....It was morally certain, however, that he was

in Judea at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; that he had heard much of him; that this would be a subject of discussion; and it was natural for him, in returning, to look at the prophecies respecting the Messiah, perhaps either to meditate on them as a suitable subject of inquiry and thought, or perhaps to examine the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to this office” (Barnes 433).

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

“Go near and join thyself to this chariot. This would reveal to Philip the hitherto unknown object of his journey, and encourage him to expect some fruit of his interview with this stranger” (Jamieson 3.53).

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt?

“Philip ‘heard him read the prophet Esaias,’ he must have been reading aloud; and though it was customary, as it still is, in the East to read aloud, since he was audible even to Philip, the probability is that he was reading not for his own benefit only, but for that of his charioteer also” (Jamieson 3.53).

31 And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me? And he deſired Philip that he would come up and ſit with him.

“The Ethiopian, being open to instruction from a Jew, invites Philip into his carriage to explain Isaiah 53:7-8 to him. His problem, it seems, concerns the suffering and humiliation references, and his question is ‘Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’

“While in Late Judaism the concept of God’s Servant carried messianic connotations in certain contexts and among certain groups, there is no evidence that anyone in pre-Christian Judaism ever thought of the Messiah in terms of a Suffering Servant” (EBC 9.364).

Is. 53:7, 8

7 He was oppreſſed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the

ſlaughter, and as a ſheep before her ſhearers is dumb, ſo he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from priſon and from judgment: and who ſhall declare his generation? for he was cut

off out of the land of the living: for the tranſgreſſion of my people was he ſtricken.

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the ſame ſcripture, and preached unto him Jeſus.

“At a time when only what Christians call the OT was Scripture, what better book was there to use in proclaiming the nature of divine redemption than Isaiah, and what better passage could be found than saiah 52:13-53:12? Thus Philip began with the very passage the Ethiopian was reading and proclaimed to him ‘the good news about Jesus,’ explaining from Isaiah 53:7-8 and its context a suffering messianology...In his volumes, therefore, Luke sets up a parallel between Jesus’ use of Isaiah 53 and Philip’s preaching based on Isaiah 53 and implies in that parallel that the latter was dependent upon the former” (EBC 9.365).

“Preached unto him Jesus. Showed him that Jesus of Nazareth exactly answered to the description of the prophet; and that therefore the prophet referred to the Messiah, and that that Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth” (Barnes Notes).

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

“The eunuch responded to Philip by asking for baptism. As a Jewish proselyte or near-proselyte, the eunuch probably knew that water baptism was the expected external symbol for a Gentile’s repentance and conversion to the religion of Israel. Therefore, it would have been quite natural for him to view baptism as the appropriate expression for his commitment to Jesus, whom he had come to accept as the fulfillment of Israel’s hope and promised Messiah” (EBC 9.365).

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

“This is the first example of a Gentile baptism. That it did not lead to the same disputes as the baptism of Cornelius, is due to the fact that it was private” (Dummelow 829).

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

“The account of the Ethiopian’s conversion ends as it began—with a stress on the special presence of God and his direct intervention. We are told that the Spirit of the Lord ‘suddenly took’ Philip from the scene. The verb *harpazo* connotes both a forceful and sudden action by the Spirit and a lack of resistance from Philip” (EBC 9.366).

“All Luke tells us about Philip is that his early ministries in Samaria and to the eunuch were important features in the development of the Christian mission from its strictly Jewish confines to its Gentile outreach. He refers to further evangelistic activity on the part of Philip in the maritime plain of Palestine and to a final ministry at Caesarea. Later he mentions Philip and his

four prophetess daughters at Caesarea in connection with Paul's last visit to Jerusalem" (EBC 9.366).